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Lone Star Mind: Reimagining Texas History by Ty Cashion.
University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, OK. 2018.
Introduction. Notes. Bibliography. Map. Index. Pp. xiv, 296.
Ebook. Cloth. \$34.95.

I was recently invited to talk to students at a Houston-area middle school. The 7th grade Texas history teacher asked her students if anyone had any questions. One precocious lad quipped, "Is Texas history really history?" I laughed and suggested he might want to read Ty Cashion's *Lone Star Mind*. Anyone who has seen Cashion at conferences for the past few years knows that he is an iconoclast of what he has termed "Texceptionalism", the insular view of the Lone Star past that has masqueraded as history for many years, yet has permeated the general public's mind largely through such "histories" as the ever-popular *Texas History Movies* comic strips that have been popular since the late-1920s to the somewhat more recent T. R. Fehernbach's *Lone Star: A History of Texas and Texans*, first published in 1968 in the wake of Disney's television series and movies about Davy Crockett, and John Wayne's successful film *The Alamo* (1960). What Cashion provides readers is a deconstruction of the almost homoerotic male-centric myth (30) of ruggedly handsome men who were more interested in their horses than women, and boldly wrested Texas from the unworthy hands of Mexicans, African-Americans and Native Americans, to bring it civilization.

Cashion's book is a historiographic tour-de-force that makes an integral component with other recent books that have shed light on how Texas history is written. In many respects, it is a historiographic seminar on Texas history, with Robert Calvert and Walter Buenger's *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations* (Texas A&M University Press, 1991), Gregg Cantrell and Elizabeth Hayes Turner's *Lone Star Pasts: Memory and History in Texas* (Texas A&M University Press, 2006), and Buenger and Arnolde De Leon's *Beyond Texas Through Time: Breaking Away from Past Interpretations* (Texas A&M University Press, 2011) assigned on the course's reading list.

Cashion explains that the popular image of a rough and rugged Texas history that makes it so unique from the other 49 states has had a deleterious effect on the serious study of the state's past.

Texas exceptionalism both encouraged and suffered from its isolation: it encouraged an iconoclastic self-congratulatory history and discouraged other historians from seriously including it in Western or Southern histories. As he points out it “creating a vacuum that allowed Texas exceptionalism to thrive.” (62) What we are left with is a history “assembled from museum exhibits, historic sites, the popular culture, and everything else *true* Texans share that satisfies their emotional and cultural needs. (67)

Cashion in the chapter “Who Owns the Texas Past?” “Traditional history revolves around the unalterable rock of American exceptionalism, self-justifying our national flaws into a teleological tale of moral instruction. The progressive interpretation embraces the attitude that a malleable and ever-evolving warts-and-all past provides its own tonic for engendering pride and loyalty, even if by ablution, rather than self-congratulations. Increasingly, the traditionalist vision of history has come to represent the core of a meta-narrative outfitted to bear the weight of conservatism. Conversely, the progressive view of history, until recently at least, could be likened more to a guiding attitude that informs everything but unites nothing, owing to a lingering postmodern distrust of grand narratives.” (129)

Cashion proposes the construction of a new meta-narrative to both explain Texas history, but also to make it more usable and more “relatable” to a modern populace. Historians have often talked about establishing a new metanarrative for the history of our nation, and the Lone Star state. Instead of one based on the narrative of the Lost Cause, or of the triumph of settlers over Native Americans and Mexicans – the *Legacy of Conquest*, as historian Patricia Nelson Limerick called it. These long-standing metanarratives formed the identity of the United States for generations and have been deeply embedded in our national imagination and psyche through the popular legends, stories, poems, songs, movies, and television shows that we watched, read, learned as children. The *Texas History Movies* comic strips read by thousands of Texas children in the pages of the *Dallas Morning News*, and later classrooms where these books assigned from the 1930s – 1970s, and in the history textbooks since the 1890s until very recently. Cashion argues that it is time to have those old narratives fade away and establish a new one for a more diverse twenty-first century Texas.

Those stories that formed the nucleus of the persistent metanarratives and the countless other stories that adorned those stories like ornaments on a Christmas tree were largely selected by individuals and groups that had the power and wealth to promote, promulgate, publish, and perpetuate these versions of popular history. Others have told different stories throughout the centuries, many ignored or forgotten. But if we are to make these alternative stories viable challengers to the hoary heroic narratives, now long in the tooth, they have to be similarly adorned and made attractive to present and future generations. Some people hold onto those old narratives because they explain an environment where they, despite the problems their ancestors faced, overcame and became successful. But just because people become successful in an environment doesn't mean the environment was good, but that they overcame the obstacles; it tells that some were able to achieve despite the environment, and that if the environment were improved perhaps more would succeed as well. New metanarratives should explain how people saw the American dream – regardless of how accurate or accessible that dream was – and sought to make it their own. Not unlike the old narratives where people struggled against adversity, but the mountains they climbed were different mountains, some the making of other climbers, and made the way for others to follow, not just themselves and their families. Cashion writes, “A new usable Texas past properly conceived will certainly be driven by the collaboration between persistent revisionists and cultural constructionists; even so, it will also leave ample room for the work of updated traditionalists to advocate the self-interested ruling class. Texas exceptionalism as a point of reference, moreover, should not be overlooked for its residual utility in helping intellectuals come to grips with the historical mind by enabling them to correct misperceptions and calibrate new directions in scholarship.”(174) Cashion's monumental work is a step in that direction, and should find a place on every Texas historian's bookshelf.

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